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"I Woke Up Already Hurting": Postcolonial Affect in Tanya Tagaq's *Split Tooth*

Abstract. Indigenous writing with postcolonial themes foregrounds the erasure and marginalization that result from colonialism. The genre-disrupting, coming-of-age novel *Split Tooth* (2018) by Inuit author Tanya Tagaq explores the personal and public life of a young Inuk woman from one of the Indigenous communities in the Canadian Arctic region. *Split Tooth* focuses on themes like the disappearances and deaths of Indigenous women, Inuit cultural settings, sexual assault, precarity, and violence. The novel meanders through emotions such as fear, shame, and grief, and can be analyzed through the theoretical framework of postcolonial affect. Postcolonial affect primarily examines the diverse emotional states of the colonized as indicators of the crisis that arises from colonization. The objective of the analysis is to highlight the delineation of affect in *Split Tooth*, as Tagaq blends the personal and the political in her narrative. Postcolonial affect is used for the theoretical examination of appropriation and violence that constitute the precarity of Inuit people, particularly women.

Keywords: Emotion, colonization, Indigenous, Inuit, *Split Tooth*, Tanya Tagaq, postcolonial affect, precarity

1. Introduction

The pivotal period for the emergence of Indigenous writing in Canada and Alaska was the 1980s and 1990s, when writers such as Jeanette Armstrong, Maria Campbell, Tomson Highway, Lee Maracle, Aritha van Herk, and Thomas King chose to foreground protest literature, highlighting colonial trauma and Indigenous resilience (Bringhurst 32–34). These writers belong to different Indigenous communities spread across Canada and Alaska. The four officially recognized Indigenous groups in Canada are the Métis, First Nations, and Inuit, with the Inuit being the smallest of these communities. The Inuit are one of the Indigenous communities located in the Arctic

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region, and their members inhabit areas of Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and Russia (Parrott). In Canada, Inuit settlements are concentrated mainly in four regions: Inuvialuit (the northwest Arctic), Nunavut (the northernmost Arctic), Nunavik (the north of Quebec region), and Nunatsiavut (Labrador and Newfoundland) (Inuit). Nunavut, being the homeland of Inuit author, visual artist, and singer Tanya Tagaq, appears as a central theme in her discourses (Woloshyn 2). Tagaq's contributions to the Indigenous cultural revival, including her career in Inuit traditional music and her award-winning writing, are highly regarded in the Alaskan/Canadian cultural scenes. In her art, Tagaq gives representation to issues such as violence against Indigenous women and ecological imperialism (Crosby 71).

As an Inuk author, Tagaq explores the dual premises of Indigenous identity and its ontological realities. As a coming-of-age novel, *Split Tooth* presents the role of Inuit young adults in the postcolonial resistance of the community. The primary motivation for writing it was Tagaq's personal experience, and she interlaces memoir, fiction, poetry, folklore, and images to provide the cultural and emotional contexts of Inuit life. She simultaneously introduces the traumatic experiences of women and social developments in the 1970s through fragmented narration, which is dedicated "For the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and Survivors of residential schools" (iii). This article examines postcolonial affect that marks the Inuit lived experience as narrated in Tagaq's prose, and the authors argue that the mapping of affect in the novel reveals the precarity caused by colonialism among the Inuit community as well as the community's resistance. It also shows how the affective positionalities in the novel hold transformative potential, even when adverse effects are involved, identifying affect as the locus of cultural resistance.

Tagaq encapsulates the more-than-human history of Nunavut, including the landscape and animals, and makes it part of the affective texture of the work. The author narrates the affective contour of Inuit life by linking it to the materiality and corporeality of Inuit culture. The novel is set in the 1970s and the early 1980s. The unnamed protagonist's life in the High Arctic from childhood to adolescence in Nunavut, with colonialism remaining a spectral presence, creates the narrative drive. The plot spans seven years, beginning in 1975 and concluding with the protagonist's high school life in 1982. The affective profiles of the narrator punctuate *Split Tooth* through journal-like entries, poems, stories, and songs. Tagaq employs magical realism to subvert the narrative techniques forced upon the Indigenous community (Černá 32). The protagonist's school life, friendships, and first loves are revealed as the plot progresses. There are constant references to the violence around and within her. While the narration is highly intimate, Tagaq presents the inextricably political nature of the Inuit lived experience. Throughout the novel, the protagonist reveals her affinity for the environment, blurring the boundaries between the human and non-human domains. Her development as an Inuk girl, assimilating the influences of the socio-cultural milieu, is central to the plot. She becomes a mother to the children of the Northern Lights, and when she loses them, she commits suicide.

2. Review of Critical Studies

Studies on emotions date back to before Socrates, having been examined in the Indian subcontinent at least since 500 BCE (Heim 30). Later developments in philosophy regarding the human mind and the rise of modern psychology in the West led to affect studies (Leys 307). The earliest theories in this field came from Brian Massumi's "The Autonomy of Affect," followed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's and Adam Frank's "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins," published in the mid-1990s. The potential for intersectionality in affect studies was later explored through the intersections of gender, race, and class. Sara Ahmed's *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* examines the marginalized experience of affect (64). Michael F. O'Riley discusses postcolonial anxiety and encounters (5). Pramod K Nayar reviews postcolonial affect within the Indian context of human rights violations (18). Following Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, Neil Lazarus's *The Postcolonial Unconscious* analyzes the impact of colonialism on the colonized psyche (162). Neetu Khanna's *Visceral Logic of Decolonization* reveals the connection between political structures and the affective experience of colonization (125). Ann Cvetkovich identifies loneliness as a form of affect rooted in gendered perspectives, as a consequence of colonialism (95).

Tagaq's novel has received considerable critical attention. The connection between "erotic healing" and "spiritual animism" in *Split Tooth* is examined by Anna Pidgorna (157). Abdenour Bouich's "Coeval Worlds, Alter/Native Words: Healing in the Inuit Arctic" explores how the novel serves as a healing space, with a focus on the Arctic environment and Inuit traditions (79–80). While addressing climate change and Inuit knowledge systems, Renée Hulan, in "Caring for the Future," discusses the "sentience" (311) of the land and the link between material and spiritual cultures. In "Time-Diffraction Stories: Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit and Temporal Sovereignty in *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* and *Split Tooth*," Sarah Best applies a posthuman approach to analyze the agency of Inuit "shamanism" and "animistic cosmologies" (5). Mehdi Ghasemi considers *Split Tooth* a "revisionist" account of colonial narratives about Inuit identity (342). Brad Buckhalter's "Calling (Out) Contemporary Settlers: Tanya Tagaq's *Split Tooth* and *Colonizer* as Trans-Media Indigenous Wonderwork" studies the novel as an Indigenous wonderwork that challenges "settler logic" (33), highlighting the agency of "other-than-human elements" (39). Adéla Černá's "Wonderworks in Canadian Indigenous Literature: The Case of Tanya Tagaq's Split Tooth" emphasizes "Indigenous futurism" (34) and fantasy elements in the novel (51). Erin Cheslow argues that the "unrepresented soundscape" of the novel re-presents sound as "an affective form" (2). Another study by Cheslow, "Revisioning Victorian(ist) Listening", compares the Victorian and Inuit soundscapes through the texts of Elizabeth Gaskell and *Split Tooth*. Elizabeth Hugh Karnes explores the role of Inuktitut in building resilience among the young Inuit community in "Linguistic Survivance in Tanya Tagaq's Split Tooth" (174). Barbara Schellhammer studies the nature of "autonomy" (96) in eroticism with reference to the sexual encounters of the protagonist with non-human beings and humans. Laura Castor's "Decolonial Interruptions of Settler Time in Tanya Tagaq's Art" investigates the nature of decolonial disruptions in the

novel, focusing on the narrative structure and the representation of dreams, myths, and traumatic events (216).

The present study probes the affective situations in *Split Tooth* by linking them to colonial trauma and cultural resistance. We foreground negative affect in the novel to analyze the responses of the Inuit community to colonial atrocities. Affect is situated in the larger framework of Inuit cultural practices and lived experience, as this article considers the repercussions of colonial intrusion.

3. Ontological Crises of Inuit Life and Postcolonial Affect

Split Tooth explores the ontological insecurities faced by the Inuit community in Nunavut, focusing on the vulnerabilities embedded in the public and personal lives of Inuit women. Tagaq offers a genre-defying narrative that brings clarity to the organic elements in *Split Tooth* (Gagnon 48). By challenging the dominant Eurocentric and imperial discursive modes, *Split Tooth* redefines the materiality of affect. Mainstream discourses about colonial lands and their Indigenous peoples often ignore the emotional and tactile realities of these communities that endured colonial invasion. The ontological insecurities troubling the Inuit stem from systemic barriers imposed by remnants of colonial control, especially as the community attempts to speak out against oppression and violence:

> Of importance is how such emerging ontological insecurities can be understood in terms of social and political change, dislocation, hybridity and impermanence and how they typically generate a search for ontological security and stability that affects contemporary political identities in one way or another. Here we highlight not only the securitising aspects of identity stability but also the opening up of these processes in terms of refusing or resisting contemporary narratives of closure and essentialisation. (Cash and Kinnvall 267)

The first-hand experience as a female Indigenous student in the infamous residential school system for the Natives shapes the plot of *Split Tooth*. The novel, in the beginning, directly addresses the theme of violence against Indigenous women, specifically domestic violence. The protagonist and her siblings huddle together in fear to avoid being seen as the older females in the family face brutalities (Tagaq 3).

Fear gains ascendancy in this situation of domestic violence, and later in the novel, the protagonist identifies fear as a tool for control. Although at least some family members try to protect the children, the looming vulnerability remains an inseparable aspect of the lived experience. Exploitation and violence are parts of the common trajectory that lies before Inuit women. Self-representation in *Split Tooth* introduces these grim aspects of existence in relation to the affective positionalities that stem from such deplorable situations. Tagaq uses the word ‘fear’ multiple times in the novel to evidence the dominant affective states that characterize the lived reality as the narration verges on memoir writing. Along with the portrayal of Inuk

women's affective states, the theme of colonial intrusion into the Indigenous socio-cultural systems also appears: "My mother was a child of transition; government relocation, the shift into capitalism, and the moulting of the Shaman Skin led to the generation of Christian Rules, Blind Faith, and Shame" (77).

Equally important is the narrator's observation of how "residential schools have beaten the Inuktitut out of this town in the name of progress, in the name of decency" (50). Colonial stipulations on language in residential schools intended the establishment of a cultural hierarchy, and the punishment for using Inuktitut as a spoken language by the Inuit children was a form of cultural dispossession. The settler governments separated families, threw people out of their own lands, attacked cultural diversity, and replaced everything Indigenous with colonial trauma (Starblanket 205). Measures such as the "genocide" of Indigenous communities (Starblanket 211), "forced relocation of Indigenous children" (95–99), "experiments on Indigenous children" at residential schools (255), and enforcement of critical infrastructure projects that are detrimental to the environment indicate governmental complicity (Bernauer 263). The purchase of the Trans Mountain pipeline (which passes through Indigenous land) in 2018 by Canada's Trudeau government and the dismissal of environmentalists and First Nations' protests against the project are recent examples (Hay 55). By describing the imposition of "Christian Rules, Blind Faith, and Shame", the narrator foregrounds the shift in the affective economy that came with cultural oppression (77). Shame is a central tenet in Christianity, where people are taught to believe themselves to be sinners and be born in original sin (77). Shaming oneself becomes a prerequisite in Christian faith, and the narrator criticizes this as she finds it entirely contradictory to Inuit thought. To emphasize the violence with which Christian Rules, Blind Faith, and Shame entered the system and the power they still hold, the narrator capitalizes the initial letters of these words that indicate colonial vestiges. This highlights the forced and established presence of religious belief systems among the Indigenous communities.

The protagonist's memory of her family is filtered through moments of terror where her "father's thunderous footsteps shake the house with a blazing ire that only he can conjure" (11). This constant fear stems not only from the discrimination and alienation Indigenous women face in a post-colonial context but also from domestic conflicts that lead to physical, psychological, and emotional abuse. Early in the novel, there is a graphic depiction of domestic violence. Such abuse among Indigenous communities is often a result of misdirected anger. The despair caused by racism and colonization can sometimes manifest as violence. This psychological trauma and its effects are discussed in terms of Indigenous affect and emotions. As Cvetkovich notes, acknowledging "settler colonialism and racial capital" as the main causes of a "mental health epidemic that produces psychic symptoms of many kinds across racial identities" would be an important step toward atonement for the appropriation of Indigenous land and resources (Cvetkovitch 97). Her conclusions are based on Fanon's insights into the psychological distress experienced by the colonized (Fanon 181). Additionally, the protagonist exhibits self-harming tendencies throughout the novel, culminating in her suicide after losing her children. The author

intentionally introduces the unnamed protagonist to highlight the harsh realities faced by Indigenous women, many of whom go missing or are murdered. While illustrating this constant precariousness that defines the very being of Inuit women, the emotional contexts of such marginalized lives are emphasized.

Fear and anxiety recur as central themes. Alongside living on the margins of a settler-dominated society, the Indigenous community faces socio-economic inequalities. The tangible nature of hate, expressed through violent acts and abusive language, is clear in the atrocities against Indigenous women (Ahmed 57). This tangible hate is often driven by essentialism in colonial narratives and perspectives. Colonial essentialism links Indigenous people with specific attributes, casting them as 'other' (Bhabha 194). Thus, colonial essentialism creates a "site of dreams, images, fantasies, myths, obsessions, and requirements" about Indigenous communities, which clearly serves colonial interests (Bhabha 199). With Inuit women experiencing double marginalization based on race and gender, colonial trauma and hostile social constructs remain intertwined in their oppression (Radcliffe 158). Even concepts of love become problematic, as this normally positive emotion is often intertwined with grief and pain in Tagaq's work. Love is portrayed as a "curse" and a source of sorrow. The narrator describes how an elderly woman from her neighbourhood overwhelms them with her "suffering love" and how her love is "so strong and heavy it seemed a burden" (Tagaq 1). *Split Tooth* depicts the destruction resulting from violence, such as domestic abuse, and also shows violence within Indigenous communities as a legacy of colonial brutality.

The narrator also explicates the horrors of the residential school system in the 1970s and 1980s as she lays bare the abusive character of these institutions, perpetuated by systemic violence. The protagonist faces continuing sexual violence at this residential school and observes other children also going through the same (4). The discrimination and violence against the Indigenous communities, especially children and women, stems from the colonial oppression based on sex and race (Green 15). Only after a suicide attempt is the protagonist able to leave the residential school. The imperial discourse on progress and civilization during colonialism remained a sham as the colonial genocidal mechanisms engaged in several crimes, such as murder and abuse of Indigenous children (MacDonald and Hudson 432). As the protagonist reveals how the residential school system was imposed on the Inuit community, she berates the notions of progress and 'moving forward' that came along with it: "Move forward with God, with money, with white skin, and without the shaman's way" (50). This is an open rejection of the modes of cultural hegemony that the colonizers introduced, namely, they forced Christianity upon the Inuit community, brought in a capitalist economy that was entirely in opposition to the Indigenous socio-economic systems, racialized the social structures, and muffled the local cultural practices and traditions through violence and murder. Later in the novel, by referring to the discovery of a shaman's corpse and the disrespect with which the corpse was treated, the narrator reflects on the conscious and ruthless attempts to destroy Inuit cultural practices. The Anglican ministers refuse to bury the shaman in the public graveyard (119).

Realising her inability to protect herself and others from the violence and injustice around her, the protagonist describes herself as "Impotent. Powerless. Voiceless. Cowardly" (51). These are not simply the affective positionalities of the protagonist but also those of her Inuit community as they reel in the aftermath of colonial injustice. In one of the poems in the text, the narrator says, "Cast in a pit of tar / The more I struggle the deeper I sink" (41). The protagonist consistently experiences a sinking, drowning, suffocating, and trapping sensation. When the narrator sees one of her Indigenous teachers at the residential school, she feels pity, indifference, and disgust (28). She finds him defeated and subjugated, and this disgusts her, even though she is aware he has gone through the same abusive residential school system. Self-hatred and self-harm among the Inuit community, like any other Indigenous community on the American continent, emerge from the repeated socio-political patterns of violence, exclusion, and alienation (Haroz et al. 676). The self-hatred of the protagonist also becomes evident when she uses butane as a drug. Guilt and Shame remain the collective affect among the community, and the narrator criticizes how people tie external reality to a sense of guilt (58). She asks how Inuit individuals are responsible for the consequences of colonial violence, which include the miserable living conditions of the community. Hence, the narrator challenges the nature of guilt experienced by the community. However, the narrator herself is not immune to Guilt, as she reveals. She feels guilty for not always being able to protect the women and girls in her community (24). Through disclosures of fear, regret, guilt, loss, desperation, and grief, the narrator rebukes the colonial disavowal of Indigenous suffering.

Tagaq also weaves her narrative with elements of magical realism (Černá 35). The protagonist is impregnated by the Northern Lights (114). Her twins, Naja and Savik, possess superhuman abilities. Naja can heal, and Savik amplifies pain to destroy 'negative' people (156-159). After her death, the protagonist becomes Lament and searches for her children, in a manner reminiscent of Inuit folklore (183). Blurring the lines between reality and fantasy serves as an act of resistance. Tagaq reclaims the emotional and intellectual independence of the Inuit community as she mocks colonial influences on storytelling. By drawing on folklore and magic realism, the narrator challenges the monolithic and canonical nature of Eurocentric narratives. The protagonist also meets an anthropomorphic polar bear and a fox (93, 70). These animals show human traits and communicate with her. She encounters a fox whose clan was cursed by the Raven Queen, and she lifts the curse through a sexual act with him (68–72). This episode reflects how the Inuit connect actions and consequences through their lore. The belief that a member's misdeed can curse the whole clan, potentially for generations, is illustrated here. Through her encounter with the Northern Lights, the protagonist becomes a mother to superhuman beings who do not resemble human infants at birth. She also undergoes a physical transformation after this encounter, evidenced by her greener eyes and faster healing ability (116).

The coexistence and internal conflict between healing and violence are metaphorically represented through the twin babies, Naja and Savik. The latter uses his strength to drain the life from negative people, causing them to wither and die. "Savik's power exists because he has

been born of my own evil, my own hunger, and our ancestors' hunger. Nature is not merciful. Neither is he. He just is. He exists in true form and is unapologetically all-consuming" (176). The protagonist's uncle dies after his encounter with Savik, and her father's health also declines due to Savik's influence. Eventually, Savik turns his violent tendencies even toward compassionate people, including Best Boy, who is the protagonist's love interest. This violence against love symbolizes the suppressed anger of Indigenous people toward colonizers, sometimes directed at loved ones within the community. Savik grows more powerful than Naja and undoes the healing she provides. As a result, the narrator notes the "imbalance of pain in the world" (159). Being her son, the protagonist loves Savik deeply, even though she recognizes the danger he poses. Despite her love for him, she decides to kill Savik to save Best Boy and tries to strangle him (180). This attempt can be seen as the Indigenous effort to suppress pain, leading to significant self-destruction, such as drug addiction. Naja appears to die watching the murder attempt on Savik, who escapes and transforms into a seal. Ultimately, Savik and Naja become one and flee, illustrating the deep connection between pain and resilience in Inuit life (181). In the end, the protagonist kills herself out of grief, unable to cope with the loss (183). This highlights the complexity of Inuit ontology and the despair that comes from failing to reconnect with primordial identity and history.

4. Inuk Identity and 'Negative Affect' as a Transformative Agent

Offering spaces for "emotional investments, political connectivity, and the possibility of change," affect becomes relevant in identifying its commitment to postcolonial resistance (Hemmings 557). This potential of the affective economy for socio-political transition is highlighted in *Split Tooth*. Anger is presented as a source of revolt and resistance in the novel. When the protagonist encounters the person who sexually abused her at school after some years, she decides to take revenge by attacking him (84). She repays abuse with violence, conveying resistance that emerges from anger and disgust. The insidious nature of child sexual abuse is shown here as the perpetrator tries to abuse the protagonist again, even though years have passed. Her deep-seated anger toward the perpetrator stems from the atrocious sexual abuse she and her classmates had to undergo during their time at the residential school (4). The ensuing trauma, which created a searing scar, is poignantly presented through a poem by situating the affective intricacies,

> None of us were strong enough
> None of us could hang on
> To the straight face, the toughness
> We are children
> Needing nurture not razor blades (82)

The self-harm among abused students in residential schools for Inuit children is depicted in *Split Tooth* as a consequence of these horrific violations. Tagaq reveals that to cope with the pain experienced in such institutions, children tried to build resilience by hurting themselves. To escape grief, children create a ritual of self-harm, which becomes a collective response to the violence and abuse they endured. This self-harm ritual circulates through the competitive idea of who can withstand more pain. Inflicting pain on themselves for resilience is, in fact, a trauma response. Many died trying to cope with torture and abuse in these segregated residential schools (MacDonald and Hudson 431).

The link between social reform and affect shows how the circulatory nature of emotions can bring about radical change: "… emotions work as a form of capital: affect does not reside positively in the sign or commodity, but is produced as an effect of its circulation" (Ahmed 45). By being infectious, affect gains its potential in relation to the collective sense. When the protagonist disrobes the misogynistic and queerphobic school bully with the help of her friends, the rebellious act is carried out by a group standing against abuse (15). It also serves as a slap to the misogyny faced by Inuit women and girls. The protagonist and her friends also break the curfew by hiding from the police officer and sneering at the unnecessary rules created by racist governments (12–13). The urge to defy the rules set by law enforcement shows more than just a teenage rebellion. This act of breaking rules that are meant to protect children symbolizes the futility of such regulations and reshapes the idea of safe spaces as the protagonist asks, "Are beds safe anyways?" (13). Tagaq's mapping of the protagonist's affect does not aim at individualization. Instead, it highlights the collective circumstances of the Inuk community. The protagonist's unnamed status exemplifies this collective sharing of trauma. The affective implications in her lived experience no longer stay confined to her personal life; they become part of the collective lived experience of Nunavut.

The protagonist experiences intense fear and anger when she becomes a victim of sexual abuse, "I lie wooden / Saying no"; she also senses the "sour fear" of the predator, which disgusts her even more (16). Due to trauma from past experiences, the protagonist maintains that "Cold can preserve you / Warmth can draw you down" (41). She even eyes love with suspicion. When her teacher "smells of victimhood and insecurity", the protagonist is "disgusted" (49–50). She reflects that her community has "violence in … bones" and "sorrow … in marrow" (151). What is commonly classified as negative affect also plays a key role in the semiotic process that underlines human consciousness. Forms of negative affect, such as anger and hate, also lead to resistance against subjugation, making social transformation inevitable:

> Negative sentiments like cynicism, opportunism, depression, bitchiness are often seen as solipsistic, individualistic and anti-communal affective stances associated with an emotional tonality of hopelessness. Yet these bad sentiments can signal the capacity to transcend hopelessness. These sentiments associated with despondence contain the potentiality for new modes of collectivity, belonging in difference and dissent. (Duggan and Muñoz 277)

Only through such collective forms of dissent does the affect become "decolonized" (Khanna 242). The protagonist observes how refusing to feel emotions causes more damage in Inuit ontology: "We plod on ignoring what we must be, what we are meant to be. We are taught to fear our instincts. We must hunt down and fall in love with the Fear, therefore defeating our self-doubt every day. This is followed by joy. This is followed by the handover of control. This is followed by lightness. This is followed by freedom" (51). A gradual shift from negative affect to positive affect is mapped here.

The protagonist exhibits yearning and pining for a better future even though she does not live to see it (66). Upon her observations of the atrocities at the residential school, she draws the conclusion that trauma is often disguised as strength, "Who can handle the biggest wound? / Who does not yield to pain or blood?" (82). When she becomes pregnant with the twins, she sees that her father distances himself from her, and she "no longer has access to his love" (140). Her parents later feel a deep sense of shame and reverence for her. The narrator draws a connection between this experience and the affective connotations of some folklore tales. As the narrator recounts Sedna's tale, she depicts how Sedna's father cuts off her fingers and throws her into the freezing ocean, only to watch her become a goddess and her fingers transform into sea creatures. Sedna was punished for becoming pregnant with a werewolf. In retaliation for her father's cruelty, Sedna ensures that humans suffer through an ecological crisis, during which several people perish (85–87). Sedna's anger toward humanity and her revenge are illustrated through gendered affect, with intersecting forms of identity recurring as a theme in the folktale. Tagaq also incorporates the themes of "seismic testing" and oil exploration in Nunavut into Sedna's tale (87). The remembrance of ancestors also falls within the affective contours of Inuit ontology. At the end of the novel, the dream sequence of the protagonist is placed, and it concerns her late grandmother visiting her and speaking of hell. In the dream sequence, the narrator subverts the Christian idea of hell. Hell is not seen simply as a lake of torment, as the protagonist becomes a saviour of spirits there. She protects them from the tortures of hell and proves that she is no kin of evil (185–87).

5. Affect as the Location of Resistance

The protagonist in *Split Tooth* is situated in a liminal context: she transitions from childhood to adulthood, navigating the in-between spaces of animal, human, and spiritual domains, and is placed in non-Inuit surroundings, ultimately evolving from a daughter to a mother (Kitching 229). Discussions often introduce their classification as positive and negative affects, which raises the question of the productivity of negative ones. In the Indigenous context, and with regard to their interaction with positive and negative affects, the scope for resistance is engendered. To overcome alienation in one's own land, "the urgency of this productive tension (between positive and negative affects) for Indigenous contexts where genocide is a pervasive everyday reality" becomes critical (Cvetkovich 96). In retaliation for the deprivation of opportunities to speak Inuktitut and the resultant sense of cultural loss, Tagaq learns the native language and

adds the Inuktitut script to the novel (48). In linking Inuit affect to the politics of language, the author points out cultural domination and the erasure of linguistic diversity, thereby erasing cultural diversity. The protagonist in the novel also refers to the gradual disappearance of Inuktitut among Inuk children (50). The "codification" (Tadiar 2) of socio-cultural contexts in the practice and preservation of traditional Inuit music by Tagaq, as well as the representation of Inuktitut in the novel, gains significance in this discussion on Inuit resistance.

Interpreting Indigenous affect from the colonial perspective only leads to a stereotyped account of emotions among the colonized. Colonial significations of "collective essence, of innate substance and primordial sentiment" incline to a sense of "homogeneity" (Comaroff and Comaroff 128) that fails to acknowledge cultural diversity. When this essentialized and restricted sense of social networks intertwines with political constructs, potentialities for violence take shape. The concepts of Indigenous upbringing, when located in the colonizer's deficient understanding of the affective economy, become subject to distortion and misrepresentation in the Eurocentric discourses. The pernicious nature of this misrepresentation is targeted by the cultural retaliation inherent in postcolonial thinking. Sara Ahmed also speaks about this distorted and flat representation of Indigenous affect (34), heavily influenced by cultural hegemony (108). Affixing a colonial sense of history to the representation of the colonized lands and their people indicates the "erasure" (Nixon 235) of local socio-political historicity. Examining Indigenous affect in a postcolonial context reveals fluid locations that depict unstable, volatile, and precarious living conditions. The act of resistance against colonial discourses on the Inuit community and the creation of realistic narratives that resonate with Inuit life is presented through a poem in the work:

> We weave our own sinew
> Make a net
> To catch those not yet dead,
> Those drowning on dry land (58)

This act of cultural resistance not only entails political intervention but also addresses the affective states of Inuit people who are being harmed.

Affect also operates as the site of cultural resistance. With attempts to destabilize cultural hegemony established through violence, the representation of affect becomes significant in identifying trauma. The protagonist contemplates whether violence should be countered with the same. The imposition of the colonial sense of emotions on the Indigenous community is representative of the essentialized approach in Western thought. Colonial discourses present preconceived notions of Indigenous communities, and Tagaq rejects such notions in her novel. The colonial stereotypes of the Inuit community are shattered through the expression of the affective spectrum that defies the dichotomies perpetuated by Eurocentric thinking (Jan-Mohamed 59; Loomba 105). Such an act of dissent entails refuting the discursive tropes around

Indigenous affect. The protagonist also revolts against the colonial sense of chronology and measurement of time, as her concept of time corresponds with the seasonal variations in the Arctic region. The complexity of desire also manifests in the novel through the blend of fantasies and folklore. Caring lemmings provide the protagonist with an "ecosemiotic space" (Zapf 224) for personal healing. She comments, "If we acted like seagulls, then perhaps we could transform into them, screaming and soaring" (27). This is an instance where Tagaq blurs the border of animal-human distinction and speciesism that undergirds the Eurocentric conceptualization of nature (Huggan and Tiffin 191). The nature of dispossession experienced by the Inuit community is closely tied to ecological imperialism, where land and resources were appropriated from the Indigenous communities (Crosby 56). The protagonist equates her children to the native land and her ancestors to signify the injustices faced by them all (176). Cultural resistance also takes a religious angle as the protagonist observes how colonizers forced Christianity on the Indigenous communities. The protagonist refuses to subscribe to the beliefs perpetuated by Christianity. Religious beliefs tied to colonial brutality assume horrendous proportions as the narrator describes how the Anglicans in their neighbourhood declined to bury the shaman at the local graveyard, "there was a real body of a shaman that had rotted at the town dump, rejected from the public graveyard by the Anglican ministers. I never understood how foreigners could come and tell us where to die and where to live" (119). Simply because the Inuk shaman practised his religion, he became an outcast to the Anglicans, and his body became subaltern, not even deserving a burial. Much like the mythical character Sedna, the protagonist's anger surfaces as she witnesses the continuing colonial violence and its effect on the socio-cultural mechanisms. The myths used in the novel are often allegorical means to describe the suffering of the Indigenous communities, particularly Inuit women. Therefore, Indigenous storytelling tradition becomes a mode of resistance against settler violence. The erasure of the Indigenous knowledge systems is also challenged when Tagaq interweaves folklore into the text.

By foregrounding the affective materialities linked to resistance, Tagaq derives metaphors of animism in depicting cultural resistance, such as the resilient image of the wolf (68). The protagonist finds herself in the wolf (68), and new frames of Indigenous ecopolitics are incorporated when the shared space between homo sapiens and other species is narrated (Adamson and Monani 21). The narrator also describes the anthropomorphic presence of a fox, who co-exists with humans. The mythical elements are again used to attribute anthropomorphic characteristics to the Northern Lights, also known as the *aurora borealis*. The Northern Lights are deified (111). Thus, the natural phenomenon is presented as the source and anticipation of resistance. Naja and Savik, the children of the Northern Lights, are identified as cultural metaphors of resistance; one denoting violent retaliation and the other healing (170).

Part of cultural resistance involves recognizing the dispossession of Indigenous epistemic systems. Historically, Indigenous knowledge production and transmission through variegated epistemic practices have been neglected and rejected by colonial epistemic systems (Mignolo 112). This is addressed in the text through the inclusion of Inuit storytelling traditions. In the

Inuit oral tradition, the same story can be used in different contexts to emphasize different concepts. Tagaq links the stories to the points of affective significance in the plot. The narrator's alienation and the resulting grief are connected to the story of the fox. The fox is also isolated, as his clan is cursed due to the Raven Queen's curse. The fox's quest for redemption parallels the protagonist's search for acceptance (70). The story also foregrounds the interconnectedness in ecology that is moored in affective implications.

The white-coded historiographic and cultural depictions of the Indigenous communities by the settler culture are subverted through the revival of Indigenous cultural traditions. Oppression of Indigenous communities includes deprivation of their cultural rights. The novel delineates the invisibility forced upon Inuit cultural markers and customs. Postcolonial resistance is tied here to the anger felt by the community owing to the loss of their tangible and intangible cultural abundance. The resistance is also directed at the audacity of the colonizer, who is entirely aware of the colonial atrocities. Yet the colonizer attempts to suppress resistance for, as Edward Said observes, "Westerners become aware that what they have to say about the history and the cultures of 'subordinate' peoples is challengeable by the people themselves, people who …. were simply incorporated, culture, land, history, and all, into the great Western empires, and their disciplinary discourses" (235). Therefore, the narrator reminds the colonizers of their answerability and accountability as oppression is furthered.

6. Conclusion

Tanya Tagaq's *Split Tooth* maps the affective terrains of Inuit ontology haunted by the spectre of colonialism. Through experimental narration, Tagaq unwraps the grief, fear, anger, and resilience of an entire community—especially its women—who were victims of violence, colonial trauma, and cultural genocide. The author illustrates the close ties between emotions and resistance, closely engaging with negative emotions. Using the method of critical narrative analysis, the article examines the interplay of Inuit affect and postcolonial resistance against colonial oppression. Critical narrative analysis was employed to identify the description of affective situations across the novel. The article has employed the methodological framework of postcolonial affect to examine the ordeal that the Inuit community endured due to colonial intervention. By illustrating the unnamed protagonist's experiences, varying from sexual abuse and cultural dispossession to numinous maternity and eventual suicide, Tagaq highlights the precarity of Inuit ontology. The article identifies that the emotional responses to such precarity are attributed agency in Tagaq's novel. In *Split Tooth*, Tagaq engages in the reclamation of agency. This reclamation happens through narrative subversion, affective resistance, and folkloric anamnesis. While enumerating the traumatic incidents in the protagonist's life, the article links such incidents to the colonial past's transgressions, such as the abuse of Indigenous children at residential schools, genocide, and cultural erasure faced by the Inuit community. The negative affects that emerged as a result of such brutalities are also viewed in terms of their transformative potential in the postcolonial context. Fear leads to awareness and self-preservation,

anger becomes a tool for resistance, and grief precedes collective memory and healing. Affect is often placed in opposition to reason in settler logic; however, it can actually act as a medium for decolonization and identity reclamation.

Our discussion contributes to the decolonization of epistemic structures by examining how Tagaq's novel challenges colonial narratives on social reform. In *Split Tooth*, Tagaq disputes Eurocentric discourses on cultural expression, critical thinking, and social organization. In this article, affect is recognized as ingrained in motivations and ventures, in opposition to the primacy given to reason. In analysing the experimental structure of Tagaq's novel and the affective situations of its characters, the authors question the disjuncture forced between emotion and intellect. *Split Tooth* does not merely become a record of trauma, but also an outline for cultural resurgence. Affect in this context holds both the weight of the past and catalyzes reform. In presenting affect as an aid for resistance, the novel calls for recognition and reparation in the continuing fight for Indigenous rights and atonement.

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